COMMUNITY AND STATE RESPONSES TO CRIME AND DISORDER: CONFLICT, COMPROMISE AND CONTRADICTION

Lynn Hancock

Using data from a comparative neighbourhood study, based in Merseyside, this paper argues the importance of recognising the contradictory and fragmented nature of contemporary urban policies and community safety strategies. It suggests that community safety plans, currently being established by police forces and local authorities in response to the Crime and Disorder Bill, need to be coherent, flexible, and responsive to local conditions. It highlights some of the problems that may be encountered in the development of such strategies. The study also shows the need to set the analysis of crime prevention policies in the context of wider urban processes.

This research emerged out of a concern to develop the 'community crime career' idea (Reiss 1986). It aims to investigate the processes involved in neighbourhood change (decline and regeneration) and the role of crime and disorder in this process. Preliminary analysis of fieldwork conducted in two localities has shown the importance of recognising the contradictory and fragmented nature of urban services and community safety strategies when theorising neighbourhood change in high crime communities. It has also illustrated the complexity of 'community' responses to crime and incivilities. This paper discusses these findings. In so doing, it reflects many of Crawford's (1997) findings in The Local Governance of Crime, which mapped some of the power relations, conflicts and compromises discernible in crime prevention 'partnerships'. However, this research adopts a different approach in that the focus is on community safety strategies in the context of other urban and social policies, at the local level.

The Crime and Disorder Bill is going through Parliament at the time of writing. The new legislation proposes a new statutory duty for local authorities, chief police officers and, in cases where a two tier local government system exists, County Councils, to develop multi-agency community safety strategies (Home Office, 1997). The research discussed in this paper supports the need for a body to take the lead in developing co-ordinated community safety strategies that are responsive to local needs (see also Morgan and Newburn, 1997). In assessing and, in some cases, responding to local needs, however, a number of problems are envisaged for the lead-agencies. The paper draws attention to some of these from the Merseyside experience. The paper argues for a more complex understanding of how communities experience neighbourhood problems and how they aspire to resolve them. The paper begins by establishing the socio-political and economic context of neighbourhood victimisation rates and experiences of incivilities as a backdrop to an examination of responses to neighbourhood-based crime and disorder. As in other community-based studies of crime and disorder, this research adopts a comparative neighbourhood approach (Bottoms and Xanthos, 1981; Bottoms et al., 1989; Bottoms et al., 1992, and Foster and Hope, 1993, for example). Both localities are to remain anonymous within the Merseyside conurbation. Nevertheless, some background information regarding the localities, 'Earleschurch' and 'Edgebank', and their regional setting, is necessary.

The study areas in context

Merseyside contains five local authority areas within its administrative boundary: Knowsley, Sefton, Wirral, St. Helens and Liverpool. The region has experienced long-term economic decline and population loss and consequently is an area containing high levels of poverty, especially in the inner-areas and outer estates. Youth unemployment is high (31.2 per cent across Liverpool City according to the 1991 Census) particularly in the inner-wards, some outer estates, and among black people (City of Liverpool, no date). Those remaining in the inner-areas are often poorer and more dependent upon local services.

Merseyside suffers disproportionately from high levels of crime especially violent crime and, more recently, crime involving firearms. This has had a negative effect upon the region's image and is a concern to those attempting to encourage inward investment (Safer Merseyside Partnership (SMP), 1996). As elsewhere, it is the most disadvantaged communities who face the greatest risk. The poorest neighbourhoods have a disproportionate level of all crimes, despite under-reporting (SMP 1996).

A number of government and partnership funded regeneration initiatives are trying to regenerate the region and its most disadvantaged localities. European Union money has also been utilised under its Objective One programme (as one of the poorest areas in Europe). Neighbourhoods identified as 'Driver 5.1' areas for European grant assistance are particularly vulnerable to crime and victimisation and are the focus for Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) investment and SMP policies (SMP, 1996). About a third of Merseyside's residents live in a Driver 5.1 area (SMP, 1996).

Housing

Earleschurch is a small residential area containing approximately 2000 households close to one of the town centres. A number of public buildings lie within its boundaries. Large Victorian houses line the streets and give the area a sense of decayed elegance. Most of the houses are sub-divided into small flats (some have been this way since the inter-war period). The 1991 Census, for example, showed that detached and semi-detached dwellings both account for less than 1 per cent of the housing stock, while terraced properties make up less than 10 per cent. Purpose built flats account for 23 per cent of housing provision. The largest housing type is converted flats (65.4 per cent).

Edgebank's housing types are similar in that there are few detached properties and a disproportionate number of converted flats (29 per cent). However, there are slightly more semi-detached properties (18 per cent) and terraced houses (27 per cent), though these remain lower than the number expected in the region as a whole. Purpose built flats account for 17 per cent of housing provision. Though, these figures mask considerable variation within Edgebank. In one sub-section the number of converted flats is fifteen times the Merseyside average and the number of purpose built flats exceed the number of converted flats in only one Enumeration District.

Changes in the use of housing have, not surprisingly, had ramifications for the physical and social fabric of both areas. While some houses converted to multiple occupation are neatly presented, others display considerable neglect, and the sub-division of property has promoted transience. The 1991 Census, for example, indicated that 26. 9 per cent of the population of Earleschurch had a different address the year before. In Earleschurch, the tenure make-up is as follows: owner occupation accounts for six per cent of stock; 11 per cent are council controlled properties; approximately a fifth of the property is privately rented (furnished and unfurnished) and the remainder, 62.5 per cent, are categorised as 'other', mainly housing association units. In Edgebank 47 per cent of properties are in owner-occupation; 9.2 per cent are council rented; 22.2 per cent are privately rented (furnished and unfurnished); and 21.3 per cent are managed by housing associations or 'other' landlords.

Edgebank is, therefore, much more 'mixed' in that it has more privately rented properties. Housing problems in Earleschurch have a number of dimensions. First, those responsible for converting the property into multiple occupation failed to provide adequately for waste storage and disposal (which accommodate up to nine households). Waste spills out onto the streets and back alleys. Second, derelict properties blight the area. Third, the climate of housing finance that followed the Housing Act (1988) meant housing associations (the major sector)

found improvement difficult to achieve. Furthermore, the type of housing provision available (mainly small flats) is regarded as a barrier to building a 'sense of community' because it inhibits population stability. Small housing units do not facilitate family settlement. Not surprisingly, rehabilitation of the housing stock in Earleschurch has been a major priority for local residents.

Population

A range of social classes live in Earleschurch. The area is attractive to professional people because of its central location; nearly 34 per cent of residents are in Classes 1 and 2 in the Registrar General's classification, according to the 1991 Census. However, the area also contains many people excluded from the labour market. Only 58 per cent of males over 16 years and 51.65 per cent of women are economically active, for example. A high figure given that the area has a high number of adults but not of old people. That said, the area has seen the number of economically active people increase between 1981 and 1991, though women have fared much better than their male counterparts. The area also has a higher than average number of students and people from different ethnic backgrounds (33.7 per cent described themselves as non-white in the 1991 Census).

Edgebank is also a mixed area, though not as ethnically diverse. It also has a higher number of old people and a low number of students. There is much variation across the area; the West side contains a high number of young adults. Earleschurch, on the other hand, has a low number of children and juveniles (which has implications for the types of disorder reported by residents).

Decline and Regeneration

The merchant and commercial classes left Earleschurch before, or during, the inter-war period; and multiple occupation and social disorder (including prostitution) began to appear then. Some professional people remained or moved in, attracted by the proximity of cultural amenities. However, many of these groups moved out during the 1960s, probably as a result of planning blight, and empty, derelict properties became more prominent. Properties were taken over by the local authority and later passed to housing associations, which were beginning to expand. Many of the houses were converted into small flats.

The evidence is unclear regarding its status as a declin*ing* neighbourhood. It has clearly lost its standing as an affluent area built for the merchant class, but it is not clear that its decline is continuous. It may be experiencing a period regeneration, at least for a time, in sections of the area. Over recent years City Challenge, English Heritage, monies from English Partnerships as well as a (reduced) amount of Housing Corporation funding has been spent in the area. Some parts of Earleschurch seem to be improving. There is a growing interest on behalf of property developers (though public funding support remains important) and some improvement in employment prospects. Though, it is difficult to assess the quality of the jobs being created.

In Edgebank the decline of the neighbourhood is more recent or at least the visible signs of decline were less striking to the casual observer until the mid-1970s. The oldest parts of the area were built for the middle-classes between the 1860s and 1890s, close to the town-centre and other amenities. Many middle-class groups moved out to more suburban areas after the war (if they had not been evacuated during it). A considerably number of the large, single family houses, unlike those in Earleschurch, were bought by upwardly mobile, skilled working-class or lower middle-class people, largely from the local town, who regarded the locality as desirable. More recently these people have entered retirement and some elderly residents have died. Because of the growth of the town, the area is now very close to the town-centre and the houses are no longer attractive to families. Dwellings have been taken over by housing associations and private landlords, and the houses have been subdivided and let (most commonly as furnished property - often the least desirable housing type). This has promoted transience as people move within the area, and out of it when circumstances allow. Following slum clearance in the 1970s, local authority housing schemes, of poor design, were built in the neighbourhood. The longer-term residents are mainly older owner-occupiers. These residents perceive increasing levels of physical disorder (litter, poorly maintained

houses, graffiti) social disorder (young people hanging around, especially outside the pubs at the weekend, and drinking on the streets) and crime. Some attribute these problems, and the decline of the area more generally, to changes in the nature of the population caused by changes in housing provision. Others recognise that diminishing demand for single family owner-occupation is pivotal in this process.

Despite a high level of residential movement within, and in and out of, Earleschurch there are many long-term residents trying, through their organisations, to promote a sense of community and the area's use-value. In Edgebank the social base does not enable strong community organisation. There are a small number of community groups but these are mainly made up of older owner-occupiers, and their goals reflect their interests, notably, the improvement of the housing stock. Improvement to the older properties is difficult because improvement grants are means tested and often a 'value gap' remains. Few older people are motivated to undergo large scale improvements. Instead they seek exit strategies. In both localities, respondents say that the council is not concerned about their area.

Crime and Disorder

Prostitution is a continuing feature in Earleschurch. There is considerable compassion felt amongst residents for the women working on the streets, support for decriminalisation in this respect, and approval for the idea of designated areas for selling sex. Residents express the belief that current policies simply move the problem around. Recent research carried out in the area found 95 per cent of residents were aware of street prostitution.[1] No consensus exists, but only 8.3 per cent said that they wished to have the women moved out of the area. Almost all (92.8 per cent) agreed that the welfare of the women should be a key consideration. The dealing of hard drugs is identified as a more pressing problem.

Prostitution, drugs and other offences against the person or property are invoked when people in the remainder of the town think of Earleschurch. The reputation of Earleschurch is blown out of proportion according to residents, workers and the police, but the area does have a crime problem. While there were 96 recorded incidents of dwelling burglaries and 25 recorded incidents of non-dwelling burglary in the year from 1 July 1994 to 30 June 1995, this is certainly an underestimate. Command and control data for 1992-4 show there were a high number of calls to the police for a range of offences: Property, assault, sexual offences, burglary, dispute, serious and minor disorder and robbery, despite high levels of under-reporting. Victim Support records a high number of cases arising from self reporting, for example, rather than referral by the police in this neighbourhood. People are unwilling to report to the police in part because many victims feel that there is little to be gained. A recent survey carried out by Victim Support suggested that only 4 per cent of people in the locality bought house insurance because of the prohibitive cost. The police report robbery of property and muggings as the main problems in the area. However, these crimes are more likely to be reported, as serious crimes tend to be, and insurance claims are less likely considerations following such incidents.

Since the rapid growth of the town in the second half of the 19th Century, there have been reports of prostitution near to the town centre adjoining Edgebank. Though, working women have rarely, if ever, solicited on the streets of the neighbourhood. Edgebank cannot be said to have a 'reputation' in the same sense that Earleschurch does. Yet the crime figures for the area would suggest that the area has more of a problem with burglary (144 recorded for the same period, 1 July 1994 to 30 June 1995) and recorded assaults are double the number in Earleschurch. (The population is slightly higher and there seems to be more of a willingness to report neighbourhood problems to the police. This may be a result of having an older population.) Activities related to prostitution account for the considerable over-representation of calls to the police regarding sexual offences in Earleschurch. This cannot account for the high number of calls regarding sexual offences in Edgebank. These were more than 13 times the regional average and are concentrated near the park-land that borders the neighbourhood. Burglary calls are nearly three times and robbery more than three times the regional average.

Recent recorded crime data shows that Edgebank has one of the highest crime rates in the town. However, many residents, particularly the older ones, do not perceive the area to be more problematic than other areas. Other neighbourhoods in the inner and outer city are regarded as more problematic. Although officially recorded crime data show the

neighbourhood to be in the police beat area that is, on average, among the three highest crime areas for both personal and property crimes in the town. The most problematic beat is the town centre. Nevertheless, most respondents agree that the area is 'going down hill'. The following interview extract is typical of the organised owner-occupiers.

It is not too bad, when you compare it with other places. It has gone down in the past few years. Out of the houses on this side of the road only four people have lived here any time. There is a quick turnover of people. The businesses have changed. There is a hamburger place on the corner and a lot of litter.

She continued..

There are lots of young people hanging around at weekends. There are five pubs on the corner. It is awful at shutting time. There is a *lot* of litter. People throw their litter down as they walk past. We have also had problems with broken windows. Buildings have deteriorated. The newcomers [private renters] don't care, they don't take care of their properties. We have also had problems with people drinking on the benches at [down the road]. People were exposing themselves to passers by. Also, a 'porn' shop opened down the road - but after complaints to the police, and a campaign, it was shut down. Litter has increased and pride in the area has gone down. (Owner-occupier, elderly, female).

The empirical work would support the idea that those organised sections of the community in Edgebank agree upon the need to resolve many problems of disorder, both social and physical. Nevertheless, caution should be exercised when considering responses to disorder. As in Earleschurch, there is no agreement over the extent to which *some* socially disorderly behaviour, such as prostitution, is problematic for the community. Similarly, in the remainder of the town in which Edgebank is situated there is no consensus concerning the extent to which prostitution is 'a problem'. In a survey carried out by one of the regeneration projects in the town during 1992, only 5.1 per cent said that prostitution should be addressed as the first priority. This is likely to be the response of those most affected by street prostitution, according to the police. They report receiving petitions demanding some 'action' from people living near the trade. Though, most street prostitution in the town occurs in a specific geographical area largely made up of industrial units.

The links between incivilities, decline and fear of crime

Much controversy has surrounded the link between incivilities, crime, particularly serious crime, and fear of crime since the publication of Wilson and Kelling's article 'Broken Windows' in 1982. Wilson and Kelling argued that there is a linear relationship between incivilities, crime and neighbourhood decline. By targeting policing toward order maintenance the possibility of crime control is enhanced; disorderly behaviour would be prevented from developing into more serious criminal acts. A number of authors have critically evaluated the thesis. Skogan, for example, has shown how 'Disorder' can be linked to fear of crime and *may* be causally related to crime (Skogan 1990). Disorder can foster withdrawal from community affairs (and thus can undermine the capacity of communities to exercise social control) and affect the housing market as peoples' satisfaction with the area declines, and as the reputation of an area grows (Skogan 1990; Hope and Hough 1988). Disorderly neighbourhoods are seen to be more likely to attract and admit people involved in crime and deviance (Stark 1987 in Skogan 1990: 79).

However, a number of points need to be made in response. First, the impact of disorder on the housing market depends in part upon the level of tolerance members of the community have to (various kinds) of disorder (Skogan 1990). This has been shown to be high amongst a large proportion of the population in Earleschurch in particular. As Taub *et al* (1984) note, people make all kinds of 'trade-offs' and weigh the risks and benefits (of moving or staying) when making decisions about whether to move out of disorderly and/or high crime areas. Other amenities may compensate for the perceived risks of remaining in a neighbourhood. People in Earleschurch describe their enjoyment of cultural and shopping facilities within easy reach because of the proximity of the town centre, for example. The 'cosmopolitan atmosphere' is also viewed positively. Second, crime and disorder may promote withdrawal from community life, and a reduction in the capacity for control (Bursik and Grasmick 1993), in areas with high levels of disorder and fear of crime. However, there is some evidence to suggest that 'middle ranging' levels of concern are not destructive toward community group

activities (Hope 1988 in Skogan 1990). Indeed, some neighbourhoods may have the economic or political resources to withstand or endure these 'signs of decline' (Matthews 1992: 32). The result may be periods of resistance to signs of decline, followed by other periods when disorder may appear to grow more rapidly as community resources wane. The ability of residents in Edgebank to resist some types of disorder in their neighbourhood (the establishment of a 'porn shop' for example) gives some support to this argument. Though, they were less successful with other problems arising in the neighbourhood. Furthermore, there may be more of a relationship between some forms of disorder and fear of crime than with crime itself (Matthews 1992; Skogan 1990). Maxfield (1987) found that there is a relationship between different types of incivilities and people's perceived risk of certain types of crime. Certain types of incivilities had little or no impact on the fear of crime 'and others only appear to have an influence on certain groups under certain conditions' (in Matthews, 1992: 26). 'Litter and groups of rowdy teenagers were the most common incivilities, but had the least impact upon the attitudes of most respondents' (Maxfield 1987: 33 in Matthews 1992: 26).

Considerations about risk are strongly related to 'vulnerability' in which age and gender are important variables (Matthews 1992). The present research shows how neighbourhood characteristics, such as the density of community networks, and the high number of people using public space, can offset people's fear of crime, even amongst those groups usually considered most fearful. In Edgebank, older people (the most settled and active in community activities) report a strong sense of community among this group and related this to their confidence. Other neighbourhood characteristics seem to counterbalance fears about crime.

[Talking about crime prevention] Personally, we have bars on the windows at the rear, which were no good when we were broken into last time because they were knocked in, the plaster surrounding the window frame is very old. The landlady is reluctant to have bars on the windows at the front. I don't leave stuff hanging around - though my flat mate does! I go out whenever I feel like it. *I feel comfortable when there are people around. It is not very far from [Street Name] and the town centre so there are always people around* (young female tenant, private rented sector, Earleschurch, emphasis added).

Matthews (1992) suggested that residents report disorder to the police not because they want the perpetrators of incivilities to receive the full force of the law, rather, they do so because there are no alternative agencies that can address neighbourhood problems. This research supports such a view. Nevertheless, the Wilson and Kelling thesis has provided the rationale for more aggressive policing policies directed towards disorder, in the United States and in Britain, including Merseyside.

Agencies' responses to crime, fear of crime and disorder

The two local authorities in which Edgebank and Earleschurch are located are partners in the Safer Merseyside Partnership. Additionally, they have initiated separate projects related to community safety over recent years, and have developed policies to deal with some types of 'disorder'. The council serving Edgebank recently introduced 'introductory tenancies' for new lettings, and has had a uniformed 'community patrol' for a number of years, arising out of a concern to protect vulnerable council buildings. In partnership with other agencies, such as housing associations and urban regeneration initiatives, local authorities have been involved in other community safety projects, such as a neighbour disputes mediation service facilitated by funding from Safer Cities.

The funding of crime prevention projects is a good starting point in the analysis of the contradictory relationships between crime prevention (and some other urban and social) polices. Community safety service providers, in the contemporary urban context, make bids to urban regeneration and other funding bodies in a competitive environment. In this context some are reluctant to share ideas and information. There are often a number of agencies providing similar or, even, identical services, but often they do not know about each other, despite being in the same region. Bids for funding are often made against each other. Cities in Schools, in Edgebank's local authority area, for example, provide a targeted programme for young people excluded from school; funded by Safer Cities. The agency works with 16 and 17 year olds - a slightly higher age group compared to similar projects elsewhere. This is in recognition that people are not 'drifting out of crime' in the way that young people did in the

past. Its objectives are to raise the self esteem of young people, to promote their welfare and social development, to increase literacy and numeracy and to provide some work experience. Respondents reported good results from this work; some young people have been offered jobs as a result of their work experience. Though the cost of the project is quite high, respondents claim that this ought to be seen against the social costs of crime or anti-social behaviour. However, while respondents regarded such work favourably, concerns were raised that others are unable to learn from their practice.

City Challenge, in the Edgebank study area (1992-7), also developed a number of community safety projects, some in partnership with the council and the SMP. Community development was a key focus and was pursued in a number of ways. One included the appointment of a community development/residents' liaison officer, who had previously been funded by Safer Cities, and another found expression in the appointment of a community drugs' prevention worker. In addition, there had been a number of target hardening initiatives such as a 'safe and warm' project (which seems to have had an impact on upon a number of older people in Edgebank) and the provision of personal alarms for vulnerable residents. Security and street-lighting improvements have also been made as part of the community safety brief. Earlechurch was also in a City Challenge area. Here, improvements to street-lighting and community development were also pursued. In this local authority area, a number of 'Partnerships'[2] also carry out community safety work. In Edgebank's local authority area two current regeneration initiatives funded from the Challenge Fund carry out community safety activities in like manner. Though, the funding of one of these was cut on the assumption that the SMP would be addressing some of its proposed projects.

However, one could argue that many provisions made through these bodies are properly the responsibility of the local authority. Street lighting reflects this most obviously. Apart from the questions of funding and training, the case for mainstream agencies, such as schools and the Youth Service, taking on the responsibility of developing work with young people who have been involved in racial harassment, for example, is easily made. Though, work of this nature has been funded separately through Safer Cities in one local authority in Merseyside. Equally other bodies, such as the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), perhaps ought to be tasked with providing training for young people including those at risk of offending or who have offended. Yet some data suggests that the TECs were reluctant to accept offenders. If *ad hoc* funding of agencies, and the damaging impact of competition, is to be avoided, monies would need to be used to integrate work with offenders, and community safety more generally, into the mainstream agencies. The implications of the present arrangements are clear when we consider the disappearance of services as time-limited funding expires. This was the case in Edgebank's local authority area, when City Challenge ended, taking the community development/residents' liaison post with it. This had a marked effect upon the marginal communities where the worker operated. Equally, it makes little sense to bear the increasing cost of working with young offenders who have been excluded from school (or the social costs of not working with them), at a time when local schools are increasingly resorting to such sanctions. A co-ordinated community safety plan offers an important opportunity to avoid some of these problems. However, an examination of local authorities' involvement in partnership, as part of the Safer Merseyside Partnership, forewarns of a number of other difficulties that may be encountered following the government's proposals (see also Crawford 1997).

The Safer Merseyside Partnership

The Safer Merseyside Partnership was formed in 1994 by the five district councils in Merseyside, the Police, together with other statutory, private, voluntary and community groups. In December 1994 the Partnership was successful in receiving £4.5M from the Challenge Fund, under the Single Regeneration Budget. Each district has a Community Safety Co-ordinator and a Community Safety Forum involving statutory and voluntary agencies.

Similar projects have been pursued across Merseyside, although there is a policy of piloting new initiatives in one of the five authorities. Key initiatives include target hardening, particularly for those at risk from multiple victimisation and vulnerable residents; security grants for small businesses in vulnerable areas; support for victims of, and campaigns to highlight issues associated with, domestic violence; detached youth action work; drugs action

teams; and action to tackle racial harassment, for example. In 1995-6, by far the greatest expenditure was allocated to target hardening activity. The effect of having to share benefits throughout the partnership area means that targeting can be compromised, however. Liverpool receives a fifth of the Safer Merseyside Partnership funding, yet the 'pathways' areas (as they are known), where most activities are concentrated, cover over 50 per cent of the city, more than any other local authority in the Partnership.

Each local authority argues for particular projects to be developed in their authority. The competition produces some conflict but this was exacerbated in the early part of 1997 when Challenge Funding was allocated. The SMP bid for £11 million but only half this amount was granted, £1.1 million for each authority. Some projects had to be abandoned. To resolve conflict between councils, each authority is encouraged to develop a preferred project in their district. Trade-offs are a necessary part of partnership activity.

Local interests and conflict

There are different interests competing at the local level. Some groups are able to argue more articulately for funding compared to others; some Community Safety Co-ordinators have had to resist demands for security funding from small businesses from outside the pathways areas, for example. Further divisions lie between agencies who support offenders and those who are more 'victim-oriented'. These findings are consistent with those of Crawford (1997). However, in examining how such conflicts work themselves out, the notion of 'policy arena' may be more useful than 'policy networks', preferred by Crawford. The idea of 'policy arena' allows the analyst to envisage a fluid situation where actors emerge and disappear, relationships and outcomes stem from conflict and negotiation, and are shaped by external pressures. The idea of 'policy networks' has proved difficult to utilise in a context of perpetual change (in the nature of relationships, networks, and between levels: local, national, global) (Wilks 1995). The policy arena can recognise powerful actors in the arena (of an organisational and personal nature). Wilks rejects any simple notion of competitive pluralism, however.

Within the policy arena only certain actors are able to gain inclusion in those games where key decisions are made and there are likely to be a number of actors which are excluded from taking part and therefore are forced to spectate (Wilks 1995: 731-2).

The idea of 'policy arena' encompasses the importance of wider structural forces (economic, political and ideological), and local variations over time and space (Wilks 1995). In this sense Community safety agendas may not necessarily focus on 'public safety' or be silent on the issue of 'private danger' (Crawford 1997: 163).

Different Community Safety Co-ordinators hold different philosophies about the nature of their business. The Community Safety Co-ordinators with responsibility for Edgebank and Earleschurch both felt that there is too much emphasis on target hardening. The Co-ordinator covering the Earleschurch study area felt that policy should be directed toward the 'causes' of crime and community safety problems rather than the 'symptoms'. The Edgebank Co-ordinator's preferred focus was community-development.

At the local level co-ordinators report good working relationships with the police but at higher levels conflict is sometimes apparent. This sometimes derives from a lack of understanding of how local government works on behalf of police representatives, but, more often, from the belief that only the police really know how to deal with crime. Academic research (a recognised basis for policy making in the SMP) is downgraded in the eyes of many senior officers. That said, interviewees note that those officers more recent to police policy-making are more open to new ideas compared to their longer serving colleagues. This is to be expected considering the extensive literature regarding cop-culture and the status of particular forms of knowledge in the police as an organisation (see also Reiner, 1992; Crawford, 1997).

Local authorities will have to grapple with such power struggles in their new role as co-ordinators of community safety plans. However, earlier legislation relating to the disempowerment of local authorities (notably the 1988 Local Government Act) may also hinder the development of the most effective multi-agency working. As one respondent noted, The rules governing other aspects of local government activity have also made things difficult. For example, rules about CCT [Compulsory Competitive Tendering] meant that there were difficulties of involving both providers and suppliers on the same committees since they may

have interests in bids - this made multi-agency working quite difficult. Solutions were difficult to arrive at as a result.

Addressing crime, disorder and incivility in the interests of regeneration

The regeneration initiatives in the area where Edgebank is located have been key players in a desire to improve the image of the locality. They are keen to alter perceptions of the area which is seen as a site of violent crime, through partnership with the police in an initiative called 'Townsafe'. This began in April 1997. Townsafe also involves the Council, Merseytravel and Transport Police. It is deliberately high profile because media attention is considered necessary if fear of crime in the town centre is to be addressed. Senior officers repudiate the idea that it is 'zero-tolerance' policing. Rather, they talk about 'spotlighting' crime and disorder (car crime, drugs, prostitution, louting, licensing, litter and traffic, and 'hotspots' - geographical areas where highlighted at the launch of the initiative). A Superintendent invoked the need to take tough action to reassure the public in the interest of regeneration at the initiative's launch. Academic theories and research (the 'Broken Windows' thesis and repeat victimisation) were referred to directly, and public opinion invoked in his rationale for 'Townsafe'.

[Regarding prostitution] there have been complaints from councillors and *more importantly* from residents who have been complaining about kerb-crawling and soliciting women. Last week a number [17] of women and kerb-crawlers were arrested. As part of their bail conditions the women have been curfewed. Two Specials had been used as decoys to catch the kerb-crawlers. I will organise a leaflet to residents to show that something had been done in response to their petition for action. Since last week there had been the arrest of 5 more women - four of whom were arrested in the action last week (author's notes, Townsafe Launch 16 May 1997).

Although the initiative raises a number of issues, for the present purposes two consequences of policing prostitution in this way are briefly highlighted. First, agencies working with prostitute women say their ability to support them (particularly in health matters) is being inhibited. Second, displacement is occurring. The initiative is pushing working women indoors, putting their tenancies at risk because of the recent introduction of probationary tenancies and nuisance clauses. Working women are also moving to Earleschurch to carry out business.

The growing visibility of women working on the streets in Earleschurch may have further repercussions. It could test the tolerance of the community, especially in the summer months when the clothing worn by prostitute women, and light evenings, enhance their visibility. Earleschurch locals have a high level of tolerance towards working women that, in part, derives from their experience over a long period. Many are aware that an aggressive policing policy simply moves the problem around and does not remove the underlying causes. Nevertheless, greater visibility may mean that some people in the community may come to regard an aggressive response as a solution. This experience suggests that local authorities, in developing a community safety plan for their areas, need to consider the implications of their plans for other neighbouring authorities and the sensibilities of local communities.

Competing interests and community safety plans

How will community safety plans be established? Morgan and Newburn (1997) note that because crime and disorder is often highly localised,
These 'hot spots' need to be the subject of focused consideration by those residents and decision-makers most closely concerned. Moreover, the way local problems are handled needs to be sensitive to the traditions and experiences of different social groups, whose attitudes to the police may be less than warm (1997: 189).
This research supports such a view. Nevertheless, there are important questions to be raised regarding whose views are to be represented in decision-making processes. To what extent should businesses have their views considered? Should business concerns be given the same weight as residents' experiences? The main 'Cultural Industries' pressure group in Earleschurch did not hold a position on vice in the area. Two respondents in its recent survey indicated that prostitution was a problem for a minority of the commercial organisations. They

differed in what they consider to be the appropriate response to soliciting women. Both contrasted with those held by residents.

The government's proposals in the Crime and Disorder Bill (Home Office, 1997) recognise the need for local authorities to scrutinise policies and practices in their own service provision. The discussion of the causes of neighbourhood decline and (some forms of) disorder outlined above, and in other research carried out on local authority housing estates (Bottoms and Xanthos, 1981; Bottoms et al, 1989; Bottoms et al, 1992; Foster and Hope, 1993; and Gill, 1977, for example) supports such an approach. Given the importance of 'housing market' processes for understanding changes in crime patterning, neighbourhood decline and disorder, there is a case for paying particular attention to housing and planning. However, the neighbourhoods that form the sites for this study have a mix of tenures; a high proportion of housing association and private rented accommodation. The local authority's role in the provision of housing is limited, unlike most other studies in Britain that have examined community crime careers.

There is evidence of good practice where housing associations have come together to address neighbourhood problems. In North Liverpool (not the focus of this research), for example, associations are developing an area-based strategy for a locality defined as being in need of 'strategic regeneration': impoverished, experiencing high levels of crime and disorder, difficult to let and unstable. The availability of funding through the North Liverpool Partnership (SRB) and, because of this, through the Housing Corporation, has been instrumental to the development of the strategy in that locality. In areas without additional funding, the extent to which improvements can be made remain limited because of cuts in the amount of capital funding available to associations. No additional funding is envisaged in the Crime and Disorder Bill, nor is there recognition of the kind of role that the lead agencies in community safety will play in mixed tenure areas following the Act.

Responding to community aspirations?

Some commentators have noted that, for many facing daily life in the highest crime communities, the new social authoritarianism has been met with approval (Hugill in *The Observer* 9 June 1996: 16-17). Journalists have pointed out that proposals to deal with noisy neighbours and those who indulge in anti-social behaviour by imposing community safety orders, for example, may be important for 'restoring order in otherwise atomising neighbourhoods' (9 June 1996: 7). Though, the evidence from this research suggests that community groups are much more sophisticated in their responses to disorder and in their understanding of the 'causes' of social incivilities than recent political and media rhetoric would suggest. More often communities highlight other, more important, problems: poor employment prospects, inadequate housing, lack of appropriate youth provision, and the need to build or rebuild a sense of 'community', for example.

This would suggest community support for the kind of 'root solutions' thrown up by a consideration of the 'root causes' of neighbourhood decline and disorder (Skogan, 1990). The political economy of disorder approach acknowledges how neighbourhood decline and disorder are related to the decline of cities; a product of cities losing out to others in the global market place. Such an approach would recognise the importance of poverty; poor housing; political decisions made by governments; and other powerful players; as well as individual housing market decisions (Skogan, 1990).

Similarly, Matthews (1992) offers a set of strategies where underlying conditions are the focus of policy. Moreover, in contrast to some of the Townsafe priorities, his approach suggests policing should focus on the unequal nature of victimisation; the prevention of displacement; the limitation of social injury for vulnerable and the least resourced groups (support and compensation); and the development of intermediary agencies. As Matthews notes, it is paradoxical that the increasing value of these agencies comes at a time when their prominence has declined markedly.

Once familiar regulatory bodies, park-keepers, station guards and social/political organisations which once acted as channels of political and social participation and as vehicles of expression and control within the public sphere, have either gone into decline or disappeared (Habermas, 1989: in Matthews, 1992: 39).

This is a cost-effective way of reducing crime and disorder in a non-punitive way. Furthermore, Matthews argues that it is necessary to target resources into areas with high

rates of crime and incivilities. He suggests that an imaginative use of resources, to support hostels, youth clubs (which, have recently been cutback in Edgebank), drop in centres and clinics, for example, is needed. The costs could be offset against the expense of the current punitive response and the cost of processing individuals through the criminal and penal systems. The present research suggests community support for many non-criminal justice responses. For example, many respondents approve of intermediary agencies such as the 'community patrol' in Edgebank's local authority area, and have used the service. In most cases residents do not wish to invoke criminal sanctions (community patrol officers have no more power than the ordinary citizen). Most calls relate to incivilities, especially youths causing annoyance. In total 21342 incidents were reported to the community patrol between January and October 1996.

Such an approach sits easily with Hope's (1995) thesis that argued the importance of addressing both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of social relations, both of which are related and affect the capacity of communities to regulate crime. The horizontal dimension 'refers to the often complex expressions of affection, loyalty, reciprocity, or dominance amongst residents, whether expressed through informal relationships or organised activities'. The vertical dimension refers to 'relations that connect local institutions to sources of power and resources in the wider civil society of which the locality is acknowledged to be a part' (1995: 24). Though, Hope (1995) notes that, as a reflection of the dominant social, economic and political context in which programmes arise, very few crime prevention initiatives have addressed both of these dimensions. In a limited way, there have been some attempts, by regeneration projects, in Merseyside to strengthen the 'vertical and horizontal dimensions of social relations'. Though, these efforts have been undermined by time limited funding; and other social and urban processes, such as the falling value of welfare benefits, poor employment prospects, and the inability of many regeneration projects to address housing problems in the study areas.

Conclusion

The Merseyside comparative neighbourhood study has highlighted that communities do not necessarily endorse the authoritarian populism so prominent in political debate over recent years. It demonstrates the contradictory and fragmented nature of urban policy and community safety. The research illustrates the need for policing policies and community safety plans that are flexible and responsive to local people's needs. It highlights some of the problems to be faced in the development of such plans, from the Merseyside experience. In particular, the study shows the need to set the analysis of crime prevention policies in the context of the wider urban fabric.

Notes

1. Personal communication, Rosie Campbell (Liverpool Hope University). [Back to text]
2. Set up since 1995 involving the voluntary sector, public sector including the TECs, educational establishments, police authority and businesses. They draw upon European, Objective One, funding and, in some areas, SRB monies. In these areas unemployment is more than 31 per cent, 55 per cent of families have no earner, and 72 per cent of households have no car. The aim of the partnerships is to provide training and skills, environmental and housing improvements and to attract new businesses so that the areas concerned are brought up to the regional average. [Back to text]

Acknowledgements

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About the author

Dr Lynn Hancock is a member of the Criminology and Sociology Group, School of Social Sciences, Middlesex University, Queensway, Enfield, London EN3 4SF. Her latest book is *Community, Crime and Disorder: Questions for Community Safety and Regeneration* (Macmillan, forthcoming).

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